

Soviet Sociology Makes a Comeback

After being banished to obscure institutes during the Brezhnev era, social scientists are back in favor and exchanges with U.S. sociologists are increasing

TATIANA ZASLAVSKAYA is today the Soviet Union's most prominent sociologist. Not only is she the head of the Soviet Sociological Association (SSA), she's also a close adviser to Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev. In addition, she was recently elected to the new Congress of Peoples' Deputies and has even been nominated to the commission charged with the extraordinary challenge of revising the Soviet constitution. It wasn't always so for Zaslavskaya. Like many of the top Soviet sociologists who emerged during the Khrushchev era, Zaslavskaya—and sociology generally—was banished by the Brezhnev administration to obscure institutes far from Moscow and deprived of opportunities for scholarly communication and travel. But like so many long undervalued pursuits, Soviet sociology, like Tatiana Zaslavskaya, is experiencing rapid rehabilitation.

Suddenly, says American University sociologist Louise Shelley, sociology is "the king of social science disciplines" in the Soviet Union.

The reason: Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev wants an expanded cadre to do research in areas such as public political attitudes, the workings of the bureaucracy, education, deviance and social control, and social mobility. And, since the U.S.S.R. has had no public opinion polls, sociology is filling the gap. Says Shelley: "It is the pulse of the Soviet Union."

As a result, new sociology departments have been established at research institutes and universities, visiting lecturers are welcomed, joint meetings are being held with U.S. sociologists, and students of sociology for the first time are being allowed to study in the United States.

The Soviets have a lot of catching up to do, according to sociologist Melvin Kohn of Johns Hopkins University. He says Soviet sociologists have rarely received

formal training in the discipline—most were trained as philosophers, economists, or historians. And while they did quite a lot of "real empirical critical sociology" in the Khrushchev era, according to Kohn, the discipline was crushed under Brezhnev. Sociologists such as Vladimir Yadov, a specialist in occupational sociology, and Igor Kon, a public opinion expert, are now enjoying new found prominence after having been left to pursue scholarship as best they could in Novosibirsk and Leningrad.

That has presented the Soviets with a quandary: How do you rehabilitate a discipline that has a yawning gap in personnel. The SSA has about 8,000 members according to Michael Swafford of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC)—compared with about 13,000 in the American Sociological Association (ASA). Most are now either in their 60s or just beginning their careers, says Kohn. In the middle is "a lot of



In from the cold. Tatiana Zaslavskaya, adviser to Gorbachev and head of the Soviet Sociological Association.

dead wood"—political appointees in positions formerly held by academics, much of which "is now being cleared out."

Last year was a turning point in the Soviets' effort to address this sociologist gap. The Communist Party passed a resolution making the development of sociology a national priority, and ever since, developments have been rapid. For example, the Institute of Social Research at the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences was renamed the Institute of Sociology and Yadov was brought back from Leningrad to run it. Grushin was retrieved from Novosibirsk to head the new All-Union Center for the Study of Public Opinion Research (his daughter Olga is now a freshman at Emory University).

Sociology departments are being opened

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—ASA head William D'Antonio

at Moscow State University and 15 other universities. And both the sociology institute and the public opinion center have been opening up sections and branches in most of the 15 republics. Public opinion research is not limited to official agencies, according to Swafford: "Even Soviet private entrepreneurs have entered the fray, faxing their results to Western news organizations in exchange for Western currency."

Personnel exchanges are also on the increase. This fall, 17 Soviets arrived in the United States to spend 2 years at 15 U.S. graduate schools. Sociology has thus become the first scientific discipline where Soviet citizens are being allowed to apply directly to U.S. institutions to do graduate work. The 17 were selected from 31 applicants who took Graduate Records Examinations. "By all accounts, this first exposure to standardized examinations was traumatic for many," reports Swafford.

The arrangement was worked out by the two countries' respective sociological associations and the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX). No government aid is involved—schools interested in having Soviets and willing to supply financial help were identified by the ASA. In addition, seven Soviet scholars are coming over to work for 1 to 3 months with American university research teams under an agreement between the Soviet Academy, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the SSRC.

Activity in the other direction includes visits to the Soviet Union, under the same program, by a half-dozen American sociology lecturers. Among them are Neil Smelser of the University of California at Berkeley and Kohn of Johns Hopkins, who will be going to Moscow in December. Soviet universities are also soliciting American Fulbright lecturers.

Kohn adds that Cornell University has made a unique arrangement with Igor Kon, the Soviet Union's leading expert on U.S. sociology, who will have a 2-week-per-year visiting professorship. Kon, says Kohn, has managed to keep abreast of the field while working at an institute in Leningrad—mainly by obtaining review copies of American books. He cleverly managed to convey the meat of the scholarship by beginning and ending his reviews with "Marxist diatribes," says Kohn. So knowledgeable is the Soviet sociologist that when he came to the ASA convention in August 1988, he was able to identify the main accomplishments of every author to whom he was introduced.

Kohn has also been involved in initiating a series of joint conferences, which have been in the planning stage since before Gorbachev took over. IREX and the ASA are supplying funds to support five U.S.-Soviet conferences that are being held alternately in the United States and the Soviet Union. The first, in 1987, was a conference on sociology and the psychology of work, held in Vilnius. This December there will be a conference in Moscow on public opinion research.

All this cross-fertilization—indeed, the blossoming Soviet interest in sociology generally—is regarded as good news both for the discipline and for U.S. Sovietologists in particular. Shelley notes that "academic positions for sociologists trained in Soviet studies have gone unfilled in recent years" and expects that to change.

Further, William V. D'Antonio, head of the ASA, says he hopes eventually to see U.S. students doing graduate work in the Soviet Union.

For its part, the ASA is looking toward bringing over another crop of Soviet students next year, this time including political scientists and economists, with the cooperation of the American Political Science Association and the American Economics Association. "Soviets are acknowledging that American sociology is where it's at," says D'Antonio. Shelley agrees. She reports that the United States—where sociology is a heavily quantitative field—was chosen as the destination for the 17 students because "French sociology is seen as too qualitative and German sociology too philosophical."

■ CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Global Warming: Blaming the Sun

A report that essentially wishes away greenhouse warming is said to be having a major influence on White House policy

A SLIM, UNREFEREED REPORT that many scientists have dismissed as biased and misleading is said to be at least partly behind the White House's recent temporizing on climate change.

And that is causing consternation among climatologists and other greenhouse experts, who are dismayed that this 35-page document by the George C. Marshall Institute, a Washington, D.C., think tank—rather than one of the massive, carefully researched and reviewed expert reports of the past several years—seems to be holding sway in the upper echelons of the Administration.

The report, "Scientific Perspectives on the Greenhouse Problem," is by three prominent scientists—William A. Nierenberg, director emeritus of Scripps Institution of Oceanography; Robert Jastrow, founder and former director of the Goddard Institute for Space Studies; and Frederick Seitz, president emeritus of Rockefeller University and past president of the National Academy of Sciences. The trio's other major foray into public policy was a vigorous defense of the Strategic Defense Initiative a few years ago.

Summing up the abundant uncertainties that surround greenhouse models and predictions, the authors say it is too soon to take any actions to reduce greenhouse gases. And by their reckoning, there is little need to. They argue that there is no evidence that the modest temperature rise of 0.5°C that has occurred this century is correlated with emissions of greenhouse gases, and they predict that decreased solar activity in the next century will lead to a cooling trend likely to offset any greenhouse warming. All of this is couched in ample caveats, but the underlying message is that the entire problem has been overblown.

Several scientists are up in arms. Steve Schneider of the National Center for Atmospheric Research, for one, has denounced

the report as a political document. Nearly 6 months after its release, he is still arguing about the report's scientific basis with Nierenberg, via letters.

"Noisy junk science," says Jerry Mahlman, director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory, where one of the major greenhouse models was developed.

A number of other respected climate researchers have suggested that the National Academy of Sciences review the study. The Academy is likely to weigh into the ruckus in some way—a couple of committees are looking at the report—though it will stop short of giving the document a formal review.

At the Environmental Protection Agency, Alan Hecht, deputy assistant administrator in the office of international activities, says he has "real problems" with the study and recently passed a critique of it onto EPA administrator William K. Reilly. As part of this informal review, Hecht asked Schneider for his comments on the report; Schneider's less-than-flattering letter is now circulating in the scientific community and on Capitol Hill, where Sena-

tor Albert Gore (D-TN), for one, is concerned.

The report does have its scientific supporters, including meteorologists like Jerome Namias of Scripps, and Richard Lindzen and Reginald Newell of Massachusetts Institute of Technology—distinguished scientists whose major work is largely outside the greenhouse field. On 23 September, Lindzen and Namias wrote to President Bush extolling the merits of the Marshall report and citing its conclusion that "current forecasts of global warming for the 21st century are so inaccurate and fraught with uncertainty as to be useless to policy-makers."

The message apparently has gotten



High-level proponent. William Nierenberg, one of the authors, briefed White House officials.

Scripps